

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 1, line 14 and ending at line 23, as follows:

--Conventionally, an image processing method of separating an input ~~a input~~ object (to be referred to as an "object" hereinafter) and background portion from an input ~~a input~~ image obtained by a video camera or the like, or cutting the contour portion of an object in a moving picture, ~~picture~~ includes a method using a blue matter process or the like as a background in image pickup, a method of manually performing separation/cutting work, and a method of automatically performing separation/cutting work.--

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 2, line 5 and ending at line 12, as follows:

--For example, there is proposed an automatic separation method using an object contour tracking method, as described in, e.g., Hidehiko Mino, "SNAKES: Present, Past, and Future", Technical Report of IEICE, PRMU97-184 (1997-12). According to this method, the processing time is short, but data of the initial contour of an object must be manually input, and a newly appearing ~~appeared~~ object is difficult to track.--

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 8, line 19 and ending at page 9, line 11, as follows:

--In general, snakes are a contour extraction model obtained by rewriting a contour (closed curve) expressed by a parameter on an image plane (x,y):

$$v(s) = (x(s), y(s))$$

where $0 \leq s \leq 1$

so as to minimize an energy function defined by the following equation (1), and determining the shape as the minimum energy state:

$E_{snake}(v(s))$

$$= \int_0^1 (E_{int}(v(s)) + E_{image}(v(s)) + E_{con}(v(s))) ds \quad \dots (1)$$

$$E_{spline}(v(s)) = \frac{1}{2} \{ \alpha \cdot (v'(s))^2 + \beta \cdot (v''(s))^2 \} \quad \dots (2)$$

$$E_{edge}(v(s)) = -\frac{1}{2} \gamma |\nabla I(v(s))|^2 \quad \dots (3)$$

where E_{int} is the internal energy, E_{image} is the image energy, and E_{con} is the external energy. E_{con} is used to actively apply ~~forcibly act~~ force on snakes from the outside. The external energy is used as needed.--

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 10, line 8 and ending at line 9, as follows:

If Yes in step S200, the process is advanced to step S201 ~~201~~; and if No, to step S206 ~~206~~--

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 10, line 16 and ending at line 20, as follows:

--In step S202, the determination unit 120 determines from the parameter 11 obtained in step S201 whether there is a global motion, i.e., whether the video camera is at rest or is moving ~~moves~~ (there is a motion such as pan or tilt).--

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 20, line 2 and ending at line 9, as follows:

--As has been described above, according to this ~~the~~ embodiment, initial contour information of an object is acquired on the basis of any result of detection of a change in the object (detection of a scene change or the appearance of a new object), ~~object~~) and detection of that it is immediately after the start of image pickup, when separating or cutting an object present in a target image from the background.--

Please amend the paragraph starting at page 21, line 1 and ending at line 6, as follows:

--The scope of the invention is, therefore, to be determined solely by the following claims and not limited by the text of the specifications and alternatives ~~alternations~~ made within a scope equivalent to the scope of the claims fall within the true spirit and scope of the invention.--